

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For Release February 17, 1971

### SECRETARY MORTON REFUSES TO EXTEND LEASE TO DRILL FOR OIL IN CALIFORNIA CONDOR AREA

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton today announced he has denied a request by U. S. Royalty Oil Corporation which in effect would have extended an oil and gas lease within the Los Padres National Forest's Sespe Condor Sanctuary in California. The lease expired January 31, 1971.

"We are refusing this request because the California condor, one of our country's most endangered species of birds, inhabits the Sespe Sanctuary, and there is reason to believe that loud noises associated with drilling inhibit condors from hatching and rearing their young. The birds are extremely sensitive to noise. The slightest amount of noise may drive the big bird permanently from its nest," he said.

Although the National Forest is managed by the Department of Agriculture, mineral leasing is administered by the Department of the Interior, which also has responsibility for protecting endangered species of wildlife.

With a wing spread up to nine feet at maturity, the California condor is North America's largest bird in flight. Its numbers and range have been diminishing over the years until now there are only an estimated 60 to 80 specimens living. Some 75 percent of the bird's nesting sites are within the 1,200-acre Sespe Condor Sanctuary.

Secretary Morton recalled that the Interior Department in March 1970 called an indefinite moratorium on any new oil and gas leasing within the Sanctuary, in a move to protect the condor. About 28 applications for leases were pending at the time.

The moratorium on new leasing was intended to give experts from the Interior and Agriculture Departments and the California Department of Fish and Game more time to conduct research on increasing the condor population.

The Los Padres National Forest is in Ventura County, north of Santa Barbara and within easy driving distance of the Los Angeles area.

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